

Important Notice to NIH Grantee and Applicant Institutions on Sexual Harassment

March 26, 2019

Dear Colleagues:

We are writing to bring to your attention a matter of great importance for the biomedical research community. As leaders of institutions that are currently receiving funding from the National Institutes of Health, we are asking for your assistance in combatting a serious problem in our workforce that threatens the health of our enterprise. Late last month, NIH leadership released an important [statement](#) outlining actions NIH is taking to become part of the solution to address sexual harassment in science. This statement was intended to send a clear message to the institutions we are funding and researchers who lead the research that sexual harassment is simply unacceptable. NIH has not and will not just look the other way when accusations come to our attention. We are now sending you this letter to ask our grantee institutions to intensify your own efforts in partnering with us to address this serious problem.

We recognize sexual harassment is [about power](#). The goal of the perpetrator, most commonly but not exclusively a man, is to objectify, exclude, demoralize, diminish, and coerce the victim, most commonly a woman, to exert power over her. It's morally indefensible, it's unacceptable, and it presents a major obstacle that is keeping women from achieving their rightful place in science.

The 2018 [National Academies report on sexual harassment of women in science](#) shined a troubling light on the prevalence of sexual harassment in medicine and biomedical science. The report also stated that "federal agencies may be perpetuating the problem of sexual harassment." In recognition of this, NIH is committed to becoming part of the solution and taking appropriate action towards ensuring a safe working environment conducive to high-quality research. We have recently established a Working Group of the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD), which is charged with tackling the underlying culture that enables sexual harassment and anticipates swiftly assisting the ACD to develop recommendations to that end.

But NIH cannot tackle this problem alone. Through this letter, NIH is clarifying expectations that institutions and investigators ensure a safe workplace and keep the agency well-informed. We expect that institutions will embrace their responsibilities to end all harassment in their own scientific workplace. To this end, we are reminding you that:

- If a principal investigator or other key personnel named on an NIH grant award is no longer able to fulfill their obligations to conduct research because they have been removed from the workplace because of sexual harassment concerns, NIH requires institutions to notify the agency of this change.
- NIH expects all NIH-funded institutions to have disseminated and implemented policies and practices that
 - foster a harassment-free environment;
 - maintain clear, unambiguous professional codes of conduct;
 - ensure employees are fully aware and regularly reminded of applicable laws, regulations, policies, and codes of conduct;
 - provide an accessible, effective, and easy process to report sexual harassment, and protection from retaliation; and

- respond promptly to allegations to ensure the immediate safety for all involved, investigate the allegations, and take appropriate sanctions.
- We can and will take action if there are concerns that sexual harassment is affecting NIH-funded research. For concerns related to NIH-funded research, an email can be sent to GranteeHarassment@od.nih.gov. We are working to create additional channels intended for confidential sharing of such information and hope to make those available in the next several weeks.
- While communication to NIH, including through the email address above, does not constitute or substitute for a report of sexual harassment for legal action or investigation, the NIH Office of Extramural Research (OER) will follow up with the relevant applicant/grantee institution on all concerns related to NIH-funded research.
- NIH appreciates your support in strongly encouraging people to report allegations of sexual harassment or assault to the appropriate authorities, which may include your local police department or your organization/institution equal employment opportunity (EEO) or human resources offices. We have reminded the extramural community of that, and have emphasized that individuals may contact the [HHS Office for Civil Rights \(OCR\)](#) to obtain additional information and file a complaint. Please see [NIH's Anti-Sexual Harassment website](#) for other information and resources.

We thank you for your support in our efforts to assure that all NIH-funded work occurs in an environment that is safe, that is free from harassment, and that is conducive to our critically important efforts to conduct high-quality research.

Sincerely,

Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., Director, NIH

Lawrence A. Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D., Principal Deputy Director, NIH

Carrie Wolinetz, Ph.D., Acting Chief of Staff, and Director, Office of Science Policy, NIH

Michael S. Lauer, M.D., Deputy Director for Extramural Research, NIH

Hannah A. Valantine, M.D., Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity, NIH